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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 1358
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1158
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SUBJECT: ROUNDTABLE WITH U.S. AMBASSADOR AND LOCAL MEDIA

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¶1. The Ambassador and PAO met on February 3 with 15 local editors and other prominent journalists for a 90-minute informal but on-the-record roundtable.

U.S. PATRIOT ACT

¶2. The journalists covered a variety of topics, starting with the State of the Union address and the President's comments on the Patriot Act. The Ambassador explained that the Act was a response to the events of September 11, 2001, and gave law-enforcement agencies in the U.S. more leeway to track down terrorists. He added that historically during wartime, the U.S. has experienced some abridgement of civil liberties, but the issue has always been vigorously debated in our democratic society.

U.S. NGOS

¶3. The journalists asked about the status of foreign NGOs working in the United States. The Ambassador pointed out that although there is certainly no restriction on foreign NGOs in the United States (with the exception of the limits on providing money to political parties), most international NGOs work in developing countries. The Ambassador stated that media reports of U.S. NGOs being linked to intelligence agencies with the goal of overthrowing governments in the region is nothing more than intentionally harmful "black propaganda."

EXTREMISM VS. TERRORISM: THE HT EXAMPLE

14. The journalists were very interested in the definition of a terrorist versus extremist organization, and wondered why extremists like Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) are allowed to operate in the United States. The Ambassador explained that unless the group is violent or espouses violence, its members are entitled to their rights under the U.S. Constitution, including the freedom of speech and of assembly. There is never, however, the right to hurt other people or destroy property. The Ambassador acknowledged that HT is an extremist organization that bears close observation, but it is not a terrorist organization because there is no proof that it has ever employed violence.

THE DANISH CARTOON CONTROVERSY

15. The journalists asked about the "Danish cartoons," noting their lack of sensitivity to Islam. A lively discussion ensued as to when it becomes like shouting "fire" in a crowded theater and goes beyond freedom of speech. The journalists bemoaned the lack of sensitivity to Islam in Western culture.

16. After these more philosophical topics, the journalists moved to the tougher questions: U.S. policy on Iran and Hamas. The Ambassador hewed closely to the Department's Echo Chamber talking points.

DNI SAYS CENTRAL ASIA TO COLLAPSE INTO CHAOS?

17. A journalist asked the Ambassador to comment on DNI Negroponte's statement that Central Asia is in danger of collapsing into chaos. The Ambassador said he could not comment

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because he had not yet seen the original statement and did not know if the DNI had been correctly quoted. (COMMENT: We have now seen the statement and expect it will elicit much media discussion in coming days. END COMMENT.)

18. The journalists unanimously concurred that an informal roundtable at the Ambassador's residence was better than a formal press conference, and that it should occur on an occasional basis. Post fully concurs and will make this a regular part of our public diplomacy outreach.
HOAGLAND